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THOMAS ATKINSON

A Quaker Patriot

1751--1815

by

EMILY QUINBY ATKINSON ELLIS

*People will not look forward to posterity who
never look backward to their ancestors.—*

EDMUND BURKE

This sketch is affectionately dedicated to
each and every one of
Thomas Atkinson's descendants
“even unto the third and
fourth generations”



Philadelphia
1935

*Thomas Atkinson was born during the reign of George II
of England and lived during the administrations
of Washington, Adams, Jefferson and
part of Madison's term of office.*

THOMAS ATKINSON was born 8th mo. 9, 1751, in Upper Makefield Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania and died in Wrightstown Township, the same county, 1st mo. 29, 1815.

He was the great-grandson of the pioneer ancestor John Atkinson and his wife Susanna Hynde, whose deaths and burials occurred at sea on their voyage from Liverpool to America on the Ship Britannia in 1699.

The preceding facts and many others relating thereto, have been so fully recorded in other genealogical sketches of the family that it is not necessary to repeat them in detail here.

The three children, William, Mary and John, the latter aged four years, who had accompanied their parents, reached these shores in safety and all grew to mature life, married and had numerous progeny.

John, who married Mary Smith, daughter of William Smith and Mary Croasdale, of Wrightstown, became the father of a son Thomas who married Mary Wildman, daughter of Joseph Wildman and Sarah Wilson and grand-daughter of Martin and Ann (Ward) Wildman, pioneer ancestors. Thomas and Mary were in turn the parents of the subject of this sketch.

The son Thomas was the elder of two children, the other being a daughter Sarah, three years his junior, who died young.

When he was about three years of age he removed with his parents to a farm on the old Bristol and Durham Road in Wrightstown township, now owned and occupied by Wilmer Atkinson Twining, a great-grandson of this boy Thomas. This farm comprised two hundred acres. The father Thomas, however, did not live long to enjoy his newly acquired property, for in 1760 he passed away at the premature age of 38 years. His widow, née Mary Wildman, married 10.3.1764 James Moore, widower, of Sadsbury, Chester County, Pennsylvania. In less than two years she also had died leaving

her only surviving child Thomas, now aged 15 years, an orphan and the sole heir to the 200 acre farm in Wrightstown.

James Moore was married four times, Mary Wildman Atkinson, widow, being his second venture. In Friends' Miscellany, Vol. VI. published in 1835 he gives an illuminating account of each of his four wives.

Of Mary he wrote: "Her solid deportment and exemplary conduct both at home and abroad were edifying; her words being few and savory, seasoned with the salt of the kingdom. She was of a cheerful disposition although her countenance was grave and solid. About five weeks before her departure, being very weak, she wrote a few lines to her son Thomas as follows: 'My dearly beloved child, I am now in a poor state of health, not knowing that I may ever see thee again, but I am willing to let thee know my mind concerning thee. I cannot write much, but let it sink the deeper in thy mind. My prayers have been put up, day and night, to Almighty God for thy preservation and my advice to thee has been frequent, as thou knowest. I think I may say, I have done all that I can. I have discharged my duty and am clear on thy account'. A few days before her decease, her son was sent for and she told him in a very affecting manner, that she had said all she could say and had done all she could do for him".

She passed away 7.13.1766 and was buried in Friends' burying ground at Sadsbury.

It appears on the records of the Wrightstown Monthly Meeting under date of 11th mo, 7, 1769, that:

"Thomas Atkinson produced a certificate from New Garden Monthly Meeting, which was read and accepted."

It seems evident that when his mother married the second time, he, being then but thirteen years of age, had accompanied her to Chester County and with her had become a member of the New Garden Monthly Meeting. After his mother's death it is believed he continued to live at the home of his step-father, James Moore, until he reached the age of eighteen years and then, returning to the farm which he had

inherited, he desired to have his membership transferred back to Wrightstown Meeting.

From this date 1769 until 1778, life seems to have run smoothly with the young man and then—something happened!

At this point let us quote a few passages from Davis' History of Bucks County:

"Less than a day's journey will take one to the Hall of Independence where Constitutional liberty was born; to the battlefields of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, Red Bank, Monmouth and to the bleak hills of Valley Forge. On three occasions the Continental Army, with Washington at its head, marched through our county to meet the enemy in historic fields and, in the trying period of December 1776, it sought shelter on Bucks County soil behind the friendly waters of the Delaware. Three signers of the Declaration of Independence, Taylor, Clymer and Morris, made their homes in our county and one of them was buried here. When the war became inevitable, Bucks was one of the first counties to act. . . .

The Society of Friends was against the war from the beginning, because strife and blood-shed were opposed to their religious tenets *but the authority of the fathers could not restrain the sons. A number of their young men gave open sympathy to the cause of the colonies and some entered the Military Service.*"

Thomas was now (1778) 27 years of age, unmarried with no one to question his actions nor say him "nay". No restraining hand of parents, wife or sister. As we shall soon learn, his was a dynamic personality. He was a man of strong convictions and firm will, who once having made up his mind a thing was right, it was little worth while for any one to try to change it, and yet this is exactly what the Wrightstown Meeting set itself to do as revealed in the minutes of that period.

Thomas had paid a "military fine" and under a minute for 3.3.1778 we read: "Reported from the Preparative Meet-

ing that Thomas Atkinson had been spoken with concerning his paying a Fine demanded of him for not Associating in the Military Exercise but Thomas not appearing at this Meeting Benjamin Hamton and David Twining are appointed to visit him on Account of what he is charged with and report to next Meeting”.

The following month, 4.7.1778 we read: “The Friends appointed to treat with Thomas Atkinson report they have taken an opportunity with him, but that he did not seem fully convinced of the Inconsistency of his Conduct with the Principles of Friends and requested the Meeting would wait with him some time longer, which being considered, his Request was allowed and his Case referred until next Meeting, under the care of the same Friends with the Addition of John Hayhurst”.

On 5.5.1778 he remained unshaken, for the minute of that date reads: “The Friends appointed on the Case of Thomas Atkinson report they have again visited him, and that he appeared to remain unconvinced of the Inconsistency of his Conduct with the Principles of Friends, and after some Consideration thereon the Meeting concluded to refer his Case another month, and the Friends appointed to visit him last Month, with the Addition of Samuel Smith and Thomas Betts, are desired to treat further with him and endeavor to convince him of the Inconsistency of his Conduct with the Discipline of Friends and Report their Service therein to next Meeting.”

But even with the additional efforts of “Samuel Smith and Thomas Betts”, Thomas remained obdurate and the Meeting no less so!

The “case” was carried over month after month, now and then a change in the personnel of the Committee occurred but otherwise the situation remained at a deadlock.

The minute of 9.1.1778, states: “. . . notwithstanding their Labour with him he appeared to remain much in the same Disposition of Mind as mentioned in a former Minute”.

This had now been going on for six months with no sign of a change of heart on the part of the offender.

10.6.1778 "Thomas Atkinson declined offering anything in Order to make Satisfaction".

11.3.1778 ". . . . he continued in the same Mind as mentioned in a former Minute".

12.1.1778 "Thomas Atkinson appeared and requested some longer Time, which the Meeting agrees to and refers his Case another Month".

1.5.1779 "Thomas Atkinson appeared and requested some longer Time, which the Meeting after some Consideration concluded to allow him". etc.

And then on the 20th of the same month he "requests a certificate to Buckingham Monthly Meeting in Order to proceed in Marriage with Sarah Smith, Junior, a member of that Meeting. . . . Notwithstanding what is against him on the Minutes it appeared most agreeable to the Meeting that some Friends be appointed to enquire concerning him in Respect to Marriage", etc., etc.

His marriage prospects apparently had no effect on him in regard to the question so long under consideration, for two weeks later

2.2.1779 " . . . he appeared to remain much in the same Disposition of Mind as mentioned in some former Minutes". At the same meeting "the Friends appointed to enquire concerning Thomas Atkinson, Report they find nothing to hinder his having a Certificate and produced one which was read, approved, signed and delivered to him". Could anything be more forgiving than that!

Can anyone have read this far without concluding that they must have loved the young man and sincerely wished to retain him as a member, notwithstanding his contumacy.

Another minute follows on 3.2.1779 but nothing favorable is reported.

On 3rd mo. 10, 1779 he was married in the Buckingham Meeting House to the aforesaid Sarah Smith, daughter of Timothy Smith and Sarah Kinsey, and great-granddaughter

of Thomas Canby and Sarah Jervis. Then the "merry chase" between Thomas and the Meeting continues:

4.6.1779 ". . . . he remained much in the same Situation as mentioned in a former Minute in not seeing his way clear to make satisfaction".

A month later 5.4.1779 they are still laboring with him " . . . he did not appear in a suitable Disposition of Mind to make satisfaction" etc., etc.

Sixth Month, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, all passed leaving Thomas still unmovable.

On 11.2.1779 the minute reads: " . . . he remained nearly in the same state of Mind", etc. This "nearly" gave the first indication of any change of heart. Was it due to Sarah's influence? Or perhaps, and more likely, it was because the Meeting had begun at last to show impatience and Thomas realized that he must "make satisfaction" or "testimony" would be made against him.

The minute of 1.4.1780 reads as follows: ". . . . if they find him not disposed to make Satisfaction *then to prepare an Essay of a Testimony against the said Thomas* and produce it to the next Meeting".

The long drawn out controversy was approaching a crisis. Continual dropping does "wear away the stone". On 2d mo. 1. 1780 "The Friends appointed to visit Thomas Atkinson reported—that Thomas signified that he was desirous to do something in order to satisfy Friends—and said further that if he did not attend next meeting should then *leave Friends at Liberty to do as they saw proper*, and after some Consideration thereon the Meeting concluded to continue the same Friends another month," etc., etc.

On 3.7.1780 "Thomas appearing produced something in Writing *in order to be reconciled to Friends*", etc., etc., and in the following month, under date of 4.4.1780 we read that "Thomas appears willing to make some Alteration in what he offered last Meeting; and Thomas being present produced something in Writing in order to condemn his Misconduct, which was read, considered, and so far accepted *as his future Conduct may render him worthy*". Evidently his "future

conduct" continued satisfactory for six years later under date of 2.7.1786 Thomas Atkinson was appointed to "keep a Record of all certificates", etc. This is the final reference made to Thomas Atkinson on any subject in the Minutes of the Wrightstown Monthly Meeting. He lived for twenty-nine years after this entry. Whether he continued in attendance at this Meeting or changed his allegiance to the Buckingham Meeting, where his marriage had taken place, is not definitely known. A search in the grave-yard of the Wrightstown Meeting fails to disclose his last resting place. The writer inclines to the belief that the Buckingham grave-yard may have received his mortal remains.

The honors in the preceding struggle seem to have fallen equally upon the patient, loving members of the Wrightstown Meeting who refused to let him go from their midst and the equally determined young man who could not make "acknowledgment" of "misconduct" for loyalty to his conscience.

Whatever other conclusion may be drawn from the foregoing sketch at least it will be agreed that Thomas did not lack firmness of will, strength of character and the courage to defend himself in what he thought was right. To be sure, in the end, the Meeting triumphed, but one still has the feeling that as "he that complies against his will is of his own opinion still"—so also was Thomas.

As a matter of interest to his descendants a list of his children is herewith appended:

Mary	{	b. 1.30.1780	m. John Atkinson
	{	d. 3.29.1803	(2nd cousin)
Jonathan	{	b. 3.9.1782	m. (1st) Esther Smith
	{	d. 11.7.1852	
Timothy	—	b. 5.25.1784	m. Deborah Smith
Thomas	—	b. 10.8.1786	m. Jane Smith
Mahlon	—	b. 4.11.1790	m. Rebecca Babb
Sarah	{	b. 2.23.1793	m. Jacob Heston
	{	d. 3.11.1826	
Joseph	{	b. 8.22.1795	
	{	d. 1815	

(within 3 days of his father, at the age of 19.)

Sarah, the mother of these children, survived her husband fifteen years. An account of later generations are obtainable in the book entitled "William Smith of 1684".

It may be of interest to know that the original spring-house is still standing on the old farm and on a date-stone, inadvertently inserted up-side down, are the initials "T. A." and the date "1762" (or 3). As Thomas' father died in 1760 it is presumed this inscription was scratched on by the small boy Thomas, then about nine years of age.

The writing of this sketch has been a "labor of love" and if it shall prove to be the means of bringing to the minds of the present and future descendants of Thomas Atkinson, an ancestor who endeavored to live up to the "Light Within" as revealed to him in that day of strife, the writer shall be well repaid.

May the spirit of Thomas Atkinson live on in generations yet unborn!

In the compilation of this sketch acknowledgment is made to Charles F. Jenkins for suggesting the idea; to C. Arthur Smith for a copy of the Wrightstown Monthly Meeting minutes and also of general reference to the following books:

"Atkinson Ancestors", by Charles Francis Jenkins, in Pennsylvania Magazine of History, Vol. 31, pp. 157-175, 435-438.

"William Smith of 1684", by Josiah B. Smith.

"The History of Bucks Co.," by W. W. H. Davis, A.M.

4000 to 5000 ft. above sea level, most of which is still being
subjected to the same degree of erosion as the 4000 ft. level.

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Direct line of descent from John Atkinson of Scotland, England, to the eighth generation inclusive

John Atkinson
m. 2.8.1686

Susanna Hynde

|

John Atkinson
m. 8.30.1717
Mary Smith

|

Thomas Atkinson
m. 8.16.1744
Mary Wildman

|

Thomas Atkinson
m. 3.10.1779
Sarah Smith

|

Jonathan Atkinson
m. 10.14.1807
Esther Smith

|

Thomas Atkinson
m. 2.11.1836
Hannah Quinby

(1) Emma Esther m. 3.16.1865 Jacob Heston Smith	(2) James Quinby m. (2d) 5.20.1868 Mary Cleaver	(3) Wilmer m. 11.28.1866 Anna Allen	(4) Mary Anna m. 3.16.1865 Howard Mal- colm Jenkins	(5) Albert m. 12.28.1870 Phebe Hilles
<i>Their children:</i> Marian Earle Elsie Venner Albert Thomas Elizabeth Heston	<i>Their children:</i> Margaretta Foulke Sara Cleaver Anna Edith Laura Burr William Foulke Helen May Caroline Jones James Clarence Edward Atkinson	<i>Their children:</i> Elizabeth Allen Emily Quinby Gertrude	<i>Their children:</i> Charles Francis Anna Mary Thomas Atkinson Edward Atkinson Algernon Sidney Florence Arthur Hugh	<i>Their children:</i> Elizabeth Twining Mary Thomas Esther Susan

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

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